

Focusing on Management in the Family:

CHOICEMAKING

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"I move that we table the motion."

"What'll I wear today, Mom?"

"We just can't seem to make up our minds about a house."

"Let's just turn this whole mess over to a lawyer and let him decide what to do."

You've heard or made statements like these. Each speaker had trouble choosing.

Sometimes our choices make little difference — whether to go downtown now or later, whether to take this path or that. However, for crucial problems our choices matter a great deal.

Choicemaking is the process of considering alternative solutions to a problem and then selecting the one which seems best.

This means that you, either consciously or unconsciously, set up "desirable" criteria. Then you track down any information needed for judging how desirable each alternative is. Next, you weigh the relative advantages and disadvantages of each. Then you reach what psychologists call the "choice point" or the point where you choose the one seeming more desirable than all the others. When you mark the "X" on the ballot or when you tell the sales clerk, "I'll take this one," you've chosen.

KEYS TO CHOICEMAKING

In choicemaking, practice may not make perfect. Because someone has made many difficult decisions, he is not necessarily an expert at choicemaking. Neither does studying the decision-making process make one an expert. But experience and awareness of the problem both help.

The keys to choicemaking are to think of more than one alternative, know what criteria to use in evaluating these and seek information.

For you, alternatives may be fewer or greater in number than for others. If you have \$100 and

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a 3-day weekend, your vacation alternatives are limited. But if you have time, the desire, energy and money, you can go almost anywhere in the world. Then your alternatives are almost endless. So resources influence the alternatives available.

JUDGING THOSE ALTERNATIVES

Your values influence your criteria for choosing among your alternatives.

If you *could* go anywhere in the world but you lack boldness, independence and adventure, you vacation in Texas. Besides resources, your criteria help determine how many and what alternatives you consider.

You might narrow the alternatives some way. Too many alternatives are frustrating, too few are limiting.

For instance, a high school senior has talent, poise and a variety of interests. His parents can afford to send him to any university in the country, and he probably would be accepted by any. His alternatives are so numerous, they're overwhelming. Since resources are not limiting factors, he turns to his values, examines them closely and sets up criteria, helping him narrow the alternatives.

Too few alternatives may be just as difficult. For instance, a high school senior may want to go to college and is accepted by only one. Or perhaps a senior, whose experience makes him apply to only one or two colleges, is accepted by neither.

Alternative-mindedness is essential to choicemaking. Several possibilities help insure a wise choice.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE CRITERIA

Criteria are like measuring sticks you've drawn up and against which you measure your "decision."

"It's got to be so wide, so high, this color, that shade, so thick, so thin and not more than so many inches long." Of course, it's not that simple. Here are some examples of measuring sticks or criteria.

In comparing two persons for a job or political office, you may compare primarily on the criteria of *honesty* and *reliability*. Someone else might judge the same two people mainly on *personality* and *appearance*.

Two young girls, recently graduated from college, try to decide whether to teach grade school or model clothes.

Girl No. 1 scores it this way:

	To teach	To model
Interesting work	+	+
Contributing to mankind	++	—
Helping others develop	++	—
Working hours flexible	—	+

Girl No. 2 scores it differently:

	To teach	To model
Excellent pay potential	—	+
Prestige in position	—	+
Work with interesting people	+	+
Live in a middle-sized town	+	—

When choosing among possibilities, you need more than information. You need to know what criteria against which to measure alternatives.

The alternatives were identical, information about the job the same, but the girls made different choices. Why? Because their "measuring sticks" or criteria for judging were different.

Most of the time we set our own criteria; sometimes the criteria is set for us. For example, our laws set some criteria for car safety features. They require that cars have safety belts, headlights and rearview mirrors.

But whether you choose your own "measuring sticks" or whether others have set criteria for you, you should be sure of your criteria before judging alternatives.

INFORMATION SEEKING

Another essential in choicemaking is information about the situation.

Too little information causes guessing haphazardly rather than choosing judiciously. Too much information can be a hindrance if it is trivial or disorganized. Obviously, our abilities to perceive and analyze information are limited. So, consider only information that is *accurate* and *relevant*.

What will we do if there's too much information?

- screen out some of it
- escape by letting someone else decide for us (hire an interior decorator, let a farm manager decide, go to a financial advisor)
- put the information into a computer (let it work out John Johnson's schedule, let it do next week's menus, let it map out the new highway)
- organize the information into a meaningful pattern for us (list the three cars we're considering with

prices and features of each so we can compare them)

Consider the huge amount of information available on any single topic such as nutrition or Viet Nam or the nation's economy. But we need *quality* information, not *quantity*. Be selective. Consider only information that is relevant and factual. Then find some framework or organization for thinking about it.

THE CHOICE POINT

When alternatives are identified and weighed in light of the criteria and information, choose.

This feeling of "did I make the right decision" becomes greater when:

1. the rejected alternative is more attractive than the chosen one.
2. the number of rejected alternatives is great.
3. the attractive alternatives are dissimilar.
4. the choice was made recently.
5. the decision is most important.

But cheer up! After choosing from a set of alternatives again and again, it does become easier. Eventually it becomes a habit. A child decides which shoe goes on which foot. For you that is no longer a choice; it is a habit.

The more habits we develop, the freer our minds are for deciding about important matters. These major choices require our concentration; yet, the small choices, too, are the ones that, with our major decisions, add up to our pattern of life.

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